RESOURCE PROTECTION AND STEWARDSHIP UNIT

Missouri River

THE MISSOURI RIVER BASIN: ECOSYSTEM STEWARDSHIP

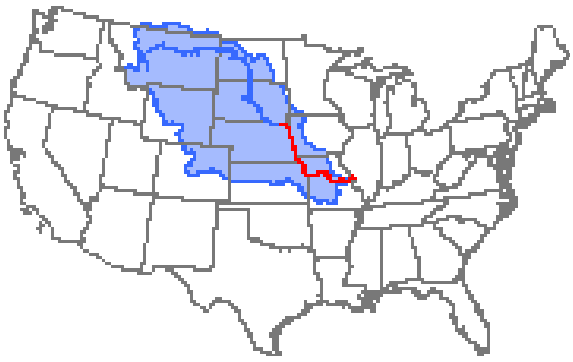
EPA Regions 7 and 8, along with various state agencies, have partnered together to develop an approach to encourage successful ecosystem stewardship of the Missouri River Basin. This approach is implemented through the use of a combination of voluntary and regulatory approaches. A multi-program Missouri River Team has been established in Region 8 to maximize results across the basin.

Missouri River,
Chouteau Co, Montana

Recent Highlights and Activities

- EPA is launching effort to facilitate interstate water quality and TMDL issues with states agencies, tribes, the Corps of Engineers.
- A National Academy of Science report summarizing the Missouri River science was recently released, requested by Region 8..
- A section of the river in North Dakota was chosen as a pilot to study assessment protocols for large rivers and will be the model for EPA's Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Program's Great Rivers Initiative.
- EPA has established a prominent role in reviewing and rewriting the Missouri River Master Manual for the Corps' reservoir operations on the river.
- A community Resource Advisory Committee was established on the Yellowstone River by local conservation districts to provide local input into a large cumulative effects study being conducted by the Corps of Engineers.
- 28 Indian Tribes in the basin have partnered with EPA on evaluating impacts to cultural resources, water quality, and ensuring environmental justice.

Setting - The Missouri River Basin is approximately 500,000 square miles in area and drains approximately 1/6 of the continental United States. The river is about 2300 miles long and courses through ten states. Since the 1930s the river has seen the construction of six large dams and approximately 735 miles of the river has been channelized for purposes of navigation. These alterations have led to conflicts among the basin's upstream and downstream states.



Missouri River Basin

Once a meandering corridor of braided channels, wetlands, flood plain forests, and backwater areas, the upper Missouri River has been fundamentally changed. In addition to the loss of habitat, water quality in the river and its many tributaries is affected by runoff of sediment and nutrients from agriculture and other human activities. Though these water quality impacts are of local concern, they also contribute to a serious ecological problem in the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico.

EPA Region 8's Ongoing Efforts

Missouri River, Lisbon Bottoms
Photo by James Whiteley

- With support from state agencies, data gathering and assessment of resources in the upper basin, including a five-year study of bottom-dwelling fish, the development of a "state of the basin" report, and a focused Environmental Assessment and Monitoring Program project.

- Improvement of ecological conditions through responsibilities under NEPA and the Clean Water Act and by building partnerships with state agencies and the basin's many diverse interest groups. For example, EPA has actively participated in the Missouri River Basin Association's efforts to build consensus among basin constituents on key river management issues.

- EPA, together with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and several state agencies, has helped bring about an effort by the Corps of Engineers to study the cumulative effects of bank stabilization projects along the river.

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- Recognizing that many of the basin's issues transcend regional boundaries, Region 8 is collaborating with 5 other EPA Regions, the Office of Water, and the Agency's Gulf of Mexico Program to focus on common issues across the entire Mississippi Basin.

Missouri River Floodplain

- EPA staff from the Montana Office in Helena are participating on a multi-agency steering committee to address water quality and other environmental issues resulting from dam operations upstream of FT. Peck Reservoir.

- EPA EMAP staff are assisting tribes at the Ft. Peck reservation with a baseline sampling effort to identify water quality changes and to help develop a TMDL for the Ft. Peck reach of the Missouri River.

- EPA has funded and participated in a locally led effort to develop a conceptual floodplain management plan to be adopted by all 5 counties along the Garrison Reach of the Missouri River.

For more information about EPA Region's activities in the Missouri River Basin, please contact Jim Berkley at 303-312-7102 or email at berkley.jim@epa.gov